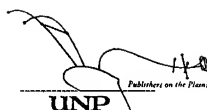


Narrative of a Journey across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River

John Kirk Townsend

Introduction by Donald Jackson

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[129] CHAPTER VIII

A substitute for game, and a luxurious breakfast — Expectations of a repast, and a disappointment — Visit of a Snake chief — his abhorrence of horse meat — A band of Snake Indians — their chief — Trade with Indians for salmon — Mr. Ashworth's adventure — An Indian horse-thief — Visit to the Snake camp — its filthiness — A Banneck camp — Supercilious conduct of the Indians — Arrival at Snake river — Equipment of a trapping party — Indian mode of catching salmon — Loss of a favorite horse — Powder river — Cut rocks — Recovery of the lost trail — Grand Ronde — Captain Bonneville — his fondness for a roving life — Kayouse and Nez Percé Indians — their appearance — An Indian Beauty — Blue mountains — A feline visit.

August 20th. — At about daylight this morning, having charge of the last guard of the night, I observed a beautiful, sleek little *coll*, of about four months old, trot into the camp, whinnying with great apparent pleasure, and dancing and curvetting gaily amongst our sober and sedate band. I had no doubt that he had strayed from Indians, who were probably in the neighborhood; but as here, every animal that comes near us is fair game, and as we were hungry, not having eaten any thing of consequence since yesterday morning, I thought the little stranger would make a good breakfast for us. Concluding, however, that it would be best to act advisedly in the matter, I put my head into Captain W.'s tent, and telling him the news, made the proposition which had occurred to me. The captain's reply was encouraging enough, — "Down with him, if you please, Mr. T., it is the Lord's doing; let us have him for breakfast." In five minutes afterwards, a bullet sealed the fate of the unfortunate visitor, and my men were set to work making fires, and rummaging [130] out the long-neglected stew-pans, while I engaged myself in flaying the little animal, and cutting up his body in readiness for the pots.

When the camp was aroused, about an hour after, the savory steam of the cookery was rising and saluting the nostrils of our hungry people with its fragrance, who, rubbing their hands with delight, sat themselves down upon the ground, waiting with what patience they might, for the unexpected repast which was preparing for them.

It was to me almost equal to a good breakfast, to witness the pleasure and satisfaction which I had been the means of diffusing through the camp.

The repast was ready at length, and we did full justice to it; every man ate until he was filled, and all pronounced it one of the most delicious meals they had ever assisted in demolishing. When our breakfast was concluded, but little of the coll remained; that little was, however, carefully packed up, and deposited on one of the horses, to furnish, at least, a portion of another meal.

The route, this morning, lay along Boisé. For an hour, the travelling was toilsome and difficult, the Indian trail, leading along the high bank of the river, steep and rocky, making our progress very slow and laborious. We then came to a wide plain, interrupted only by occasional high banks of earth, some of them of considerable extent, across which ran the path. Towards mid-day, we lost sight of these banks, the whole country appearing level, with the exception of some distant hills in the south-west, which we suppose indicate the vicinity of some part of Snake river.

We have all been disappointed in the distance to this river, and the length of time required to reach it. Not a man in our camp has ever travelled this route before, and all we have known about it has been the general course.

[131] In the afternoon, we observed a number of Indians on the opposite side of the river, engaged in fishing for salmon. Captain W. and two men immediately crossed

over to them, carrying with them a few small articles to exchange for fish. We congratulated ourselves upon our good fortune in seeing these Indians, and were anticipating a plentiful meal, when Captain W. and his companions returned, bringing only *three* small salmon. The Indians had been unsuccessful in fishing, not having caught enough for themselves, and even the offer of exorbitant sums was not sufficient to induce them to part with more.

In the afternoon, a grouse and a beaver were killed, which, added to the remains of the colt, and our three little salmon, made us a tolerable supper. While we were eating, we were visited by a Snake chief, a large and powerful man, of a peculiarly dignified aspect and manner. He was naked, with the exception of a small blanket which covered his shoulders, and descended to the middle of the back, being fastened around the neck with a silver skewer. As it was pudding time with us, our visitor was of course invited to sit and eat; and he, nothing loath, deposited himself at once upon the ground, and made a remarkably vigorous assault upon the mixed contents of the dish. He had not eaten long, however, before we perceived a sudden and inexplicable change in his countenance, which was instantly followed by a violent ejection of a huge mouthful of our luxurious fare. The man rose slowly, and with great dignity, to his feet, and pronouncing the single word "*shekum*," (horse,) in a tone of mingled anger and disgust, stalked rapidly out of the camp, not even wishing us a good evening. It struck me as a singular instance of accuracy and discrimination in the organs of taste. We had been eating of the multifarious compound without being able to recognize, by the taste, a single ingredient which it contained; a stranger came amongst us, who did not know, when he [132] commenced eating, that the dish was formed of more than one item,

and yet in less than five minutes he discovered one of the very least of its component parts.

It would seem from this circumstance that the Indians, or it may be the particular tribe to which this man belongs, are opposed to the eating of horse flesh, and yet, the natural supposition would be, that in the gameless country inhabited by them they would often be reduced to such shifts, and thus readily conquer any natural reluctance which they might feel to partake of such food. I did not think until after he left us, that if the chief knew how the horse meat he so much detested was procured, and where, he might probably have expressed even more indignation, for it is not at all unlikely that the colt had strayed from his own band.

21st.—The timber along the river banks is plentiful, and often attains a large size. It is chiefly of the species called balsam poplar, (*Populus balsamifera*.)

Towards noon to-day, we observed ahead several groups of Indians, perhaps twenty in each, and on the appearance of our cavalcade, they manifested their joy at seeing us, by the most extravagant and grotesque gestures, dancing and capering most ludicrously. Every individual of them was perfectly naked, with the exception of a small thong around the waist, to which was attached a square piece of flannel, skin, or canvass, depending half way to the knees. Their stature was rather below the middle height, but they were strongly built and very muscular. Each man carried his salmon spear, and these, with the knives stuck in their girdles, appeared to be their only weapons, not one of them having a gun. As we neared them, the first group ran towards us, crying "Shoshoné, Shoshoné," and caused some delay by their eagerness to grasp our hands and examine our garments. After one group had become satisfied with fingering [133] us, we rode on and

suffered the same process by the next, and so on until we had passed the whole, every Indian crying with a loud voice, "*Tabiboo sant, tabiboo sant!*" (white man is good, white man is good.)

In a short time the chief joined us, and our party stopped for an hour, and had a "talk" with him. He told us, in answer to our questions, that his people had fish, and would give them for our goods if we would sleep one night near their camp, and smoke with them. No trade, of consequence, can ever be effected with Indians, unless the pipe be first smoked, and the matter calmly and seriously deliberated upon. An Indian chief would think his dignity seriously compromised if he were expected to do *any thing* in a hurry, much less so serious a matter as a salmon or beaver trade; and if we had refused his offered terms, he would probably have allowed us to pass on, and denied himself the darling rings, bells, and paint, rather than infringe a custom so long religiously practised by his people. We were therefore inclined to humor our Snake friend, and accordingly came to a halt, on the bank of the river.

The chief and several of his favored young braves sat with us on the bank, and we smoked with them, the other Indians forming a large circle around.

The chief is a man rather above the ordinary height, with a fine, noble countenance, and remarkably large, prominent eyes. His person, instead of being naked, as is usual, is clothed in a robe made of the skin of the mountain sheep; a broad band made of large blue beads, is fastened to the top of his head, and hangs over on his cheeks, and around his neck is suspended the foot of a huge grizzly bear. The possession of this uncouth ornament is considered among them, a great honor, since none but those whose prowess has enabled them to kill the animal, are allowed to wear it, and with their weak and

inefficient weapons, [134] the destruction of so fierce and terrible a brute, is a feat that may well entitle them to some distinction.

We remained two hours at the spot where we halted, and then passed on about four miles, accompanied by the chief and his people, to their camp, where we pitched our tents for the night. In a short time the Indians came to us in great numbers, with bundles of dried salmon in their arms, and a few recent ones. We commenced our trading immediately, giving them in exchange, fish-hooks, beads, knives, paint, &c., and before evening, had procured sufficient provision for the consumption of our party until we arrive at the falls of Snake river, where we are told we shall meet the Bannecks, from whom we can doubtless trade a supply, which will serve us until we reach Walla-walla.

While we were pursuing our trade, Richardson and Mr. Ashworth rode into the camp, and I observed by the countenance of the latter, that something unusual had occurred. I felt very certain that no ordinary matter would be capable of ruffling this calm, intrepid, and almost fool-hardy young man; so it was with no little interest that I drew near, to listen to the tale which he told Captain W. with a face flushed with unusual anger, while his whole person seemed to swell with pride and disdain.

He said that while riding about five miles behind the party, (not being able to keep up with it on account of his having a worn out horse,) he was attacked by about fifty of the Indians whom we passed earlier in the day, dragged forcibly from his horse and thrown upon the ground. Here, some held their knives to his throat to prevent his rising, and others robbed him of his saddle bags, and all that they contained. While he was yet in this unpleasant situation, Richardson came suddenly upon them, and

the cowardly Indians released their captive instantly, throwing the saddle bags and every thing else upon the ground and flying like frightened antelopes over the plain. The only real damage that Mr. Ashworth sustained, was the total loss of his [135] saddle bags, which were cut to pieces by the knives of the Indians, in order to abstract the contents. These, however, we think he deserves to lose, inasmuch, as with all our persuasion, we have never been able to induce him to carry a gun since we left the country infested by the Blackfeet; and to-day, the very show of such a weapon would undoubtedly have prevented the attack of which he complains.

Richardson gives an amusing account of the deportment of our young English friend while he was lying under the knives of his captors. The heavy whip of buffalo hide, which was his only weapon, was applied with great energy to the naked backs and shoulders of the Indians, who winced and stamped under the infliction, but still feared to use their knives, except to prevent his rising. Richardson, says, that until he approached closely, the blows were descending in rapid succession, and our hunter was in some danger of losing his characteristic dignity in his efforts to repress a loud and hearty laugh at the extreme ludicrousness of the whole scene.

Captain W., when the circumstances of the assault were stated to him, gave an immediate order for the suspension of business, and calling the chief to him, told him seriously, that if an attempt were again made to interrupt any of his party on their march, the offenders should be tied to a tree and whipped severely. He enforced his language by gestures so expressive that none could misunderstand him, and he was answered by a low groan from the Indians present, and a submissive bowing of their heads. The chief appeared very much troubled, and harangued his

people for considerable time on the subject, repeating what the captain had said, with some additional remarks of his own, implying that even a worse fate than whipping would be the lot of future delinquents.

22d.—Last night during the second guard, while on my walk [136] around the camp, I observed one of my men squatted on the ground, intently surveying some object which appeared to be moving among the horses. At his request, I stooped also, and could distinctly perceive something near us which was certainly not a horse, and yet was as certainly a living object. I supposed it to be either a bear or a wolf, and at the earnest solicitation of the man, I gave the word "fire." The trigger was instantly pulled, the sparks flew from the flint, but the rifle was not exploded. At the sound, an Indian sprang from the grass where he had been crouching, and darted away towards the Snake camp. His object certainly was to appropriate one of our horses, and very fortunate for him was it that the gun missed fire, for the man was an unerring marksman. This little warning will probably check other similar attempts by these people.

Early in the morning I strolled into the Snake camp. It consists of about thirty lodges or wigwams, formed generally of branches of trees tied together in a conic summit, and covered with buffalo, deer, or elk skins. Men and little children were lolling about the ground all around the wigwams, together with a heterogeneous assemblance of dogs, cats, some tamed prairie wolves, and other "*varmints*." The dogs growled and snapped when I approached, the wolves cowered and looked cross, and the cats ran away and hid themselves in dark corners. They had not been accustomed to the face of a white man, and all the quadrupeds seemed to regard me as some monstrous production, more to be feared than loved or courted. This dis-

like, however, did not appear to extend to the bipeds, for many of every age and sex gathered around me, and seemed to be examining me critically in all directions. The men looked complacently at me, the women, the dear creatures, smiled upon me, and the little naked, pot-bellied children crawled around my feet, examining the fashion of my hard shoes, and playing with the [137] long fringes of my leathern inexpressibles. But I scarcely know how to commence a description of the *tout en semble* of the camp, or to frame a sentence which will give an adequate idea of the extreme filth, and most horrific nastiness of the whole vicinity. I shall therefore but transiently glance at it, omitting many of the most disgusting and abominable features.

Immediately as I entered the village, my olfactories were assailed by the most vile and mephitic odors, which I found to proceed chiefly from great piles of salmon entrails and garbage which were lying festering and rotting in the sun, around the very doors of the habitations. Fish, recent and half dried, were scattered all over the ground, under the feet of the dogs, wolves and Indian children; and others which had been split, were hanging on rude platforms erected within the precincts of the camp. Some of the women were making their breakfast of the great red salmon eggs as large as peas, and using a wooden spoon to convey them to their mouths. Occasionally, also, by way of varying the repast, they would take a huge pinch of a drying fish which was lying on the ground near them. Many of the children were similarly employed, and the little imps would also have hard contests with the dogs for a favorite morsel, the former roaring and blubbering, the latter yelping and snarling, and both rolling over and over together upon the savory soil. The whole economy of the lodges, and the inside and outside appearance, was

of a piece with every thing else about them — filthy beyond description — the very skins which covered the wigwams were black and stiff with rancid salmon fat, and the dresses (if dresses they may be called) of the women, were of the same color and consistence, from the same cause. These *dresses* are little square pieces of deer skin, fastened with a thong around the loins, and reaching about half way to the knees; the rest of the person is entirely naked. Some of the women had little children clinging like bullfrogs to their backs, without being fastened, and in that situation [138] extracting their lactiferous sustenance from the breast, which was thrown over the shoulders.

It is almost needless to say, that I did not remain long in the Snake camp; for although I had been a considerable time estranged from the abodes of luxury, and had become somewhat accustomed to, at least, a partial assimilation to a state of nature, yet I was not prepared for what I saw here. I never had fancied any thing so utterly abominable, and was glad to escape to a purer and more wholesome atmosphere.

When I returned to our camp, the trading was going on as briskly as yesterday. A large number of Indians were assembled around, all of whom had bundles of fish, which they were anxious to dispose of. The price of a dried salmon is a straight awl, and a small fish hook, value about one cent; ten fish are given for a common butcher knife that costs eight cents. Some, however, will prefer beads, paint, &c., and of these articles, about an equal amount in value is given. A beaver skin can be had for a variety of little matters, which cost about twelve and a half cents; value, in Boston, from eight to ten dollars!

Early in the afternoon, we repacked our bales of goods and rode out of the encampment, the Indians yelling an adieu to us as we passed them. We observed that one

had wrapped a buffalo robe around him, taken a bow and arrows in his hand, and joined us as we went off. Although we travelled rapidly during the afternoon, the man kept with us without apparent over-exertion or fatigue, trotting along constantly for miles together. He is probably on a visit to a village of his people who are encamped on the "Big river."

23d.—Towards noon, to-day, we fell in with a village, consisting of thirty willow lodges of Bannecks. The Indians flocked out to us by hundreds, leaving their fishing, and every other employment, to visit the strangers. The chief soon made himself known to us, and gave us a pressing invitation to stop a [139] short time with them, for the purpose of trade. Although we had a good supply of fish on hand, and did not expect soon to suffer from want, yet we knew not but we might be disappointed in procuring provision lower in the country, and concluded, therefore, to halt for half an hour, and make a small increase to our stock. We were in some haste, and anxious to travel on as quickly as possible, to Snake river. Captain W., therefore, urged the chief to have the fish brought immediately, as he intended soon to leave them. The only reply he could obtain to this request, was "*te sant*," (it is good,) accompanied by signs, that he wished to smoke. A pipe was provided, and he, with about a dozen of his young men, formed a circle near, and continued smoking, with great tranquillity, for half an hour.

Our patience became almost exhausted, and they were told that if their fish were not soon produced, we should leave them empty as we came; to this, the only answer of the chief was a sign to us to remain still, while he deliberated yet farther upon the subject.

We sat a short time longer in silent expectation, and were then preparing to mount our horses and be off, when

several squaws were despatched to one of the lodges. They returned in a few minutes, bringing about a dozen dried fish. These were laid in small piles on the ground, and when the usual price was offered for them, they refused it scornfully, making the most exorbitant demands. As our articles of trade were running low, and we were not in immediate want, we purchased only a sufficiency for one day, and prepared for our departure, leaving the ground strewn with the neglected salmon. The Indians were evidently very much irritated, as we could perceive by their angry countenances, and loud words of menace. Some loosed the bows from their shoulders, and shook them at us with violent gestures of rage, and a boy, of seventeen or eighteen years of age, who stood near me, struck my horse on the head with a [140] stick, which he held in his hand. This provoked me not a little; and spurring the animal a few steps forward, I brought my heavy whip several times over his naked shoulders, and sent him screeching into the midst of his people. Several bows were drawn at me for this act, and glad would the savages have been to have had me for a short time at their mercy, but as it was, they feared to let slip their arrows, and soon dropped their points, contenting themselves with vapping away in all the impotence of childish rage. As we rode off, they greeted us, not with the usual gay yell, but with a scornful, taunting laugh, that sounded like the rejoicings of an infernal jubilee. Had these people been provided with efficient arms, and the requisite amount of courage to use them, they might have given us some inconvenience.

Towards evening, we arrived on Snake river, crossed it at a ford, and encamped near a number of lodges along the shore. Shortly afterwards, Captain W., with three men, visited the Indians, carrying with them some small

articles, to trade for fish. In about half an hour they returned, bringing only about ten salmon. They observed, among the Indians, the same disinclination to traffic that the others had manifested; or rather, like the first, they placed a higher value than usual upon the commodity, and wanted, in exchange, articles which we were not willing to spare them. They treated Captain W. with the same insolence and contempt which was so irritating from those of the other village.

This kind of conduct is said to be unusual among this tribe, but it is probably now occasioned by their having recently purchased a supply of small articles from Captain Bonneville, who, they inform us, has visited them within a few days.

Being desirous to escape from the immediate vicinity of the village, we moved our camp about four miles further, and stopped for the night.

[141] 24th.—The sudden and entire change from flesh exclusively, to fish, ditto, has affected us all more or less, with diarrhœa and pain in the abdomen; several of the men have been so extremely sick, as scarcely to be able to travel; we shall, however, no doubt, become accustomed to it in a few days.

We passed, this morning, over a flat country, very similar to that along the Platte, abounding in wormwood bushes, the pulpy-leaved thorn, and others, and deep with sand, and at noon stopped on a small stream called *Malheur's creek*.⁶⁴

Here a party of nine men was equipped, and despatched up the river, and across the country, on a trapping expedition, with orders to join us early in the ensuing winter, at the fort on the Columbia. Richardson was the chief

⁶⁴ Malheur River rises in a lake of that name in Harney County, Oregon, and flows east and northeast into the Lewis, being one of the latter's important western tributaries.—Ed.

of this party, and when I grasped the hand of our worthy hunter, and bade him farewell, I felt as though I were taking leave of a friend. I had become particularly attached to him, from the great simplicity and kindness of his heart, and his universally correct and proper deportment. I had been accustomed to depend upon his knowledge and sagacity in every thing connected with the wild and roving life which I had led for some months past, and I felt that his absence would be a real loss, as well to myself, as to the whole camp, which had profited so much by his dexterity and skill.

Our party will now consist of only seventeen men, but the number is amply sufficient, as we have passed over the country where danger is to be apprehended from Indians. We followed the course of the creek during the afternoon, and in the evening encamped on Snake river, into which Malheur empties. The river is here nearly a mile wide, but deep and clear, and for a considerable distance, perfectly navigable for steamboats, or even larger craft, and it would seem not improbable, that at some distant day, these facilities, added to the excellence of the alluvial soil, should induce the stout and hardy adventurers of our country to make permanent settlements here.

[142] I have not observed that the Indians often attempt fishing in the "big river," where it is wide and deep; they generally prefer the slues, creeks, &c. Across these, a net of closely woven willows is stretched, placed vertically, and extending from the bottom to several feet above the surface. A number of Indians enter the water about a hundred yards above the net, and, walking closely, drive the fish in a body against the wicker work. Here they frequently become entangled, and are always checked; the spear is then used dexterously, and they are thrown out, one by one, upon the shore. With industry, a vast

number of salmon might be taken in this manner; but the Indians are generally so indolent and careless of the future, that it is rare to find an individual with provision enough to supply his lodge for a week.

25th.—Early in the day the country assumed a more hilly aspect. The rich plains were gone. Instead of a dense growth of willow and the balsam poplar, low bushes of wormwood, &c., predominated, intermixed with the tall, rank prairie grass.

Towards noon, we fell in with about ten lodges of Indians, (Snakes and Bannecks,) from whom we purchased eighty salmon. This has put us in excellent spirits. We feared that we had lost sight of the natives, and as we had not reserved half the requisite quantity of provisions for our support to the Columbia, (most of our stock having been given to Richardson's trapping party,) the prospect of several days abstinence seemed very clear before us.

In the afternoon, we deviated a little from our general course, to cut off a bend in the river, and crossed a short, high hill, a part of an extensive range which we have seen for two days ahead, and which we suppose to be in the vicinity of Powder river, and [143] in the evening encamped in a narrow valley, on the borders of the Shoshoné.⁶⁵

26th.—Last night I had the misfortune to lose my favorite, and latterly my only riding horse, the other having been left at Fort Hall, in consequence of a sudden lameness, with which he became afflicted only the night before our departure.⁶⁶ The animal was turned out as

⁶⁵ Lewis River here makes a considerable bend to the east, hence the short cut across country. The mountains are apparently the Burnt River Range, with Powder River beyond. Wyeth identifies this as the same place at which he encamped two years previous — near the point where the Oregon Short Line railway crosses Lewis River.—ED.

⁶⁶ I afterwards ascertained that this lameness of my "buffalo horse," was intentionally caused by one of the hopeful gentry left in charge of the fort, for the

usual, with the others, in the evening, and as I have never known him to stray in a single instance, I conclude that some lurking Indian has stolen him. It was the fattest and handsomest horse in the band, and was no doubt carefully selected, as there was probably but a single Indian, who was unable to take more, for fear of alarming the guard. This is the most serious loss I have met with. The animal was particularly valuable to me, and no consideration would have induced me to part with it here. It is, however, a kind of accident that we are always more or less liable to in this country, and as a search would certainly be fruitless, must be submitted to with as good a grace as possible. Captain W. has kindly offered me the use of horses until we arrive at Columbia.

We commenced our march early, travelling up a broad, rich valley, in which we encamped last night, and at the head of it, on a creek called Brulé, we found one family, consisting of five Snake Indians, one man, two women, and two children.⁶⁷ They had evidently but very recently arrived, probably only last night, and as they must certainly have passed our camp, we feel little hesitation in believing that my lost horse is in their possession. It is, however, impossible to prove the theft upon them in [144] any way, and time is not allowed us to search the premises. We cannot even question them concerning it, as our interpreter, McCarey, left us with the trapping party.

We bought, of this family, a considerable quantity of

purpose of rendering the animal unable to travel, and as a consequence, confining him to the fort at the time of our departure. The good qualities of the horse as a buffalo racer, were universally known and appreciated, and I had repeatedly refused large sums for him, from those who desired him for this purpose.—TOWNSEND.

⁶⁷ Burnt (Brulé) River rises in Strawberry Mountains of eastern Oregon, and flows northeast, then southeast, through Baker County into Lewis River. The Oregon Trail left the latter river at the mouth of Burnt River, and advanced up that valley to its northern bend.—ED.

dried choke-cherries, these being the only article of commerce which they possessed. This fruit they prepare by pounding it with stones, and drying it in masses in the sun. It is then good tasted, and somewhat nutritive, and it loses, by the process, the whole of the astringency which is so disagreeable in the recent fruit.

Leaving the valley, we proceeded over some high and stony hills, keeping pretty nearly the course of the creek. The travelling was, as usual in such places, difficult and laborious, and our progress necessarily slow and tedious. Throughout the day, there was no change in the character of the country, and the consequence was, that three of our poor horses gave up and stopped.

27th.—This morning, two men were left at the camp, for the purpose of collecting and bringing on, moderately, the horses left yesterday, and others that may hereafter fail. We were obliged to leave with them a stock of provision greater in proportion than our own rather limited allowance, and have thus somewhat diminished our chance of performing the remainder of the journey with satisfied appetites, but there is some small game to be found on the route, grouse, ducks, &c., and occasionally a beaver may be taken, if our necessities are pressing. We made a noon camp on Brulé, and stopped at night in a narrow valley, between the hills.

28th.—Towards noon to-day, we lost the trail among the hills, and although considerable search was made, we were not able to find it again. We then directed our course due north, and at 2 o'clock struck Powder river, a narrow and shallow stream, plentifully fringed with willows. We passed down this [145] river for about five miles and encamped.⁶⁸ Captain W. immediately left us to

⁶⁸ Powder River rises in the Blue Mountains and flows first east, then north, then abruptly southeast into the Lewis; the trail followed its north-bearing course.

look for the lost trail, and returned in about two hours, with the information that no trace of it could be found. He therefore concludes that it is up stream, and to-morrow we travel back to search for it in that direction. Our men killed, in the afternoon, an antelope and a deer fawn, which were particularly acceptable to us; we had been on an allowance of one dried salmon per day, and we had begun to fear that even this poor pittance would fail before we could obtain other provision. Game has been exceedingly scarce, with the exception of a few grouse, pigeons, &c. We have not seen a deer, antelope, or any other quadruped larger than a hare, since we left the confines of the buffalo country. Early this morning, one of our men, named Hubbard, left us to hunt, and as he has not joined us this evening, we fear he is lost, and feel some anxiety about him, as he has not been accustomed to finding his way through the pathless wilds. He is a good marksman, however, and will not suffer much for food; and as he knows the general course, he will probably join us at Walla-walla, if we should not see him earlier.

29th.—We commenced our march early this morning, following the river to a point about six miles above where we struck it yesterday. We then took to the hills, steering N. N. W.,—it being impossible, from the broken state of the country, to keep the river bank.

Soon after we commenced the ascent, we met with difficulties in the shape of high, steep, banks, and deep ravines, the ground being thickly strewed with sharp, angular masses of lava and basalt. As we proceeded, these difficulties increased to such a degree, as to occasion a fear that our horses could never proceed. The hills at length became like a consolidated mass of irregular rock, and

These western affluents of the Lewis (or Snake) were explored (1819) and probably named by Donald McKenzie, then of the North West Company.—ED.

the small strips of earthy matter that occasionally appeared, were burst into wide fissures by the desiccation to which [146] the country at this season is subject. Sometimes, as we approached the verges of the cliffs, we could see the river winding its devious course many hundred feet below, rushing and foaming in eddies and whirlpools, and fretting against the steep sides of the rocks, which hemmed it in. These are what are called the cut-rocks, the sides of which are in many places as smooth and regular as though they had been worked with the chisel, and the opening between them, through which the river flows, is frequently so narrow that a biscuit might be thrown across it.

We travelled over these rocks until 1 o'clock in the day, when we stopped to rest in a small ravine, where we found a little water, and pasture for our horses. At 3, we were again on the move, making across the hills towards the river, and after a long, circuitous march, we arrived on its banks, considerably wearied, and every horse in our band lamed and completely exhausted. We have not yet found any clue to the trail for which we have been searching so anxiously; indeed it would be impossible for a distinguishable trace to be left over these rugged, stony hills, and the difficulty of finding it, or determining its direction is not a little increased by a dense fog which constantly envelopes these regions, obscuring the sun, and rendering it impossible to see an object many hundred yards in advance.

The next day we were still travelling over the high and steep hills, which, fortunately for our poor horses, were far less stony than hitherto. At about noon we descended to the plain, and struck the river in the midst of a large level prairie. We proceeded up stream for an hour, and to our great joy suddenly came in sight of a broad, open trail stretching away to the S. W. We felt, in some degree, the pleasure of a sailor who has found the port of which

he has been long and anxiously in search. We made a noon camp here, at which we remained two hours, and then travelled on in fine spirits over a beautiful, level, and unobstructed country. Our horses seemed to participate in our [147] feelings, and trotted on briskly, as though they too rejoiced in the opportunity of escaping the dreaded hills and rocks. Towards evening we crossed a single range of low hills and came to a small round prairie, with good water and excellent pasture. Here we found a family of *Kayouse* Indians, and encamped within sight of them. Two squaws from this family, visited us soon after, bringing some large kamas cakes and fermented roots, which we purchased of them.

31st.—Our route this morning, was over a country generally level and free from rocks; we crossed, however, one short, and very steep mountain range, thickly covered with tall and heavy pine trees, and came to a large and beautiful prairie, called the *Grand ronde*.⁹⁹ Here we found Captain Bonneville's company, which has been lying here several days, waiting the arrival of its trapping parties. We made a noon camp near it, and were visited by Captain Bonneville. This was the first time I had seen this gentleman. His manners were affable and pleasing, and he seemed possessed of a large share of bold, adventurous, and to a certain extent, romantic spirit, without which no man can expect to thrive as a mountain leader. He stated that he preferred the "free and easy" life of a mountain hunter and trapper, to the comfortable and luxurious indolence of a dweller in civilized lands, and would not exchange his homely, but wholesome mountain fare, and his buffalo

⁹⁹ Grande Ronde, a noted halting place on the Oregon Trail, was so called from its apparently circular shape, as the traveller wound down the precipitous road into its level basin; it really is an oval twenty miles long, containing three hundred thousand acres of rich land. It is in the present Union County, and Grande Ronde River flows northeasterly through it.—Ed.

lodge, for the most piquant dishes of the French *artiste*, and the finest palace in the land.⁷⁰ This came well from him, and I was pleased with it, although I could not altogether agree with him in sentiment, for I confess I had become somewhat weary of rough travelling and rough fare, and looked forward with no little pleasure to a long rest under a Christian roof, and a general participation in Christian living.

With the captain, came a whole troop of Indians, Kay-ouse, [148] Nez Percés, &c. They were very friendly towards us, each of the chiefs taking us by the hand with great cordiality, appearing pleased to see us, and anxious to point out to us the easiest and most expeditious route to the lower country. These Indians are, almost universally, fine looking, robust men, with strong aqualine features, and a much more cheerful cast of countenance than is usual amongst the race. Some of the women might almost be called beautiful, and none that I have seen are homely. Their dresses are generally of thin deer or antelope skin, with occasionally a bodice of some linen stuffs, purchased from the whites, and their whole appearance is neat and cleanly, forming a very striking contrast to the greasy, filthy, and disgusting Snake females. I observed one young and very pretty looking woman, dressed in a great superabundance of finery, glittering with rings and beads, and flaunting in broad bands of scarlet cloth. She was mounted astride,—Indian fashion,—upon a fine bay horse, whose head and tail were decorated with scarlet and blue ribbons, and the saddle, upon which the fair one sat, was ornamented all over with beads and little hawk's bells. This damsel did not do us the honor to dismount, but seemed to keep warily aloof, as though she

⁷⁰ For a brief sketch of Bonneville, consult Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies* in our volume xx, p. 267, note 167.—ED.

feared that some of us might be inordinately fascinated by her fine person and splendid equipments, and her whole deportment proved to us, pretty satisfactorily, that she was no common beauty, but the favored companion of one high in office, who was jealous of her slightest movement.

After making a hasty meal, and bidding adieu to the captain, and our friendly Indian visitors, we mounted our horses, and rode off. About half an hour's brisk trotting brought us to the foot of a steep and high mountain, called the *Blue*. This is said to be the most extensive chain west of the dividing ridge, and, with one exception perhaps the most difficult of passage.⁷¹ The whole mountain is densely covered with tall pine trees, with [149] an undergrowth of service bushes and other shrubs, and the path is strewn, to a very inconvenient degree, with volcanic rocks. In some of the ravines we find small springs of water; they are, however, rather rare, and the grass has been lately consumed, and many of the trees blasted by the ravaging fires of the Indians. These fires are yet smouldering, and the smoke from them effectually prevents our viewing the surrounding country, and completely obscures the beams of the sun. We travelled this evening until after dark, and encamped on a small stream in a gorge, where we found a plot of grass that had escaped the burning.

September 1st.—Last evening, as we were about retiring to our beds, we heard, distinctly, as we thought, a loud halloo, several times repeated, and in a tone like that of

⁷¹ Blue Mountains are a continuation of the chains of western Idaho, trending southwest, then west, toward the centre of the state of Oregon, forming a watershed between the Lewis and Columbia systems. Frémont suggests that their name arises from the dark-blue appearance given to them by the pines with which they are covered. The trail led northwest from Union into Umatilla County, following the present railway route, only less circuitous.—ED.

a man in great distress. Supposing it to be a person who had lost his way in the darkness, and was searching for us, we fired several guns at regular intervals, but as they elicited no reply, after waiting a considerable time, we built a large fire, as a guide, and lay down to sleep.

Early this morning, a large panther was seen prowling around our camp, and the hallooing of last night was explained. It was the dismal, distressing yell by which this animal entices its prey, until pity or curiosity induces it to approach to its destruction. The panther is said to inhabit these forests in considerable numbers, and has not unfrequently been known to kill the horses of a camp. He has seldom the temerity to attack a man, unless sorely pressed by hunger, or infuriated by wounds.